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ABSTRACT

None of the various organizational methods (archival, categorical, encyclopedic, taxonomic, and statistical) employed to organize, classify, and categorize research in counseling psychology has been able to capture a sense of the whole; none appreciates the relations among research topics. Concept mapping, a research method in which nonmetric multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis are applied to unstructured card sorts, represents an alternative approach that incorporates archival, categorical, and statistical elements of previous efforts. A study was conducted which used topical titles of The Counseling Psychologist as the source of concept map items. Research participants (N=52) were members of the American Psychological Association's Division 17 (Counseling Psychology). They completed rating sheets in which they indicated the perceived professional significance each title had for them and then sorted into piles cards on which each title was printed along with the instruction to sort the cards in a way that made sense to them. To the extent that participants meaningfully arrayed and prioritized these research titles, an alternative organizational scheme resulted. Concept mapping appears to be a viable alternative research method for investigations wherein the contents and underlying structure of phenomena are areas of focus. (NB)

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Research Themes in Counseling Psychology: A Concept Map

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In the symposium,

Concept mapping applications in counseling psychology research

Mark A. Kunkel, Chair

Running head: RESEARCH THEMES: A CONCEPT MAP

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Abstract

Various strategies for organizing research in counseling psychology are presented and evaluated. Concept mapping, a research method in which nonmetric multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis are applied to unstructured card sorts, is suggested as an alternative approach to organization of counseling psychology research. A concept map in which The Counseling Psychologist topical titles were used as items is presented and its implications for research organization discussed.

Research Themes in Counseling Psychology: A Concept Map

Research in counseling psychology is important not only insofar as it contributes to the knowledge domain, but also in serving as a statement of professional scope, policy and priority (cf. Pepinsky, Hill-Frederick, & Epperson, 1978). The far-reaching and diverse nature of counseling psychology research inquiry, however, makes it difficult to capture a sense of the whole and appreciate relations among research topics. Thus, several attempts have been made to organize, classify and categorize research in counseling psychology.

Past efforts have employed various organizational methods: (a) archival, in which research topics are listed and perhaps indexed, (b) categorical, in which some organizational scheme is used to meaningfully array research topics, (c) encyclopedic, an approach in which topics are not only presented but illustrated and elaborated upon, (d) taxonomic, involving an heirchical organization of topics in which some are "covered" by others, and (e) a statistical approach in which research is quantitatively organized. Each of these will be briefly discussed.

In an early archival effort, Kirk (1958) developed an indexing system to organize counseling psychology research references in a local counseling center. Although the original intent of this system was solely to facilitate retrieval of references, other benefits accrued in its development and use:

> (This) effort was essentially an attempt to organize and define the field itself, to establish common concepts and terminology, and to facilitate communication within the field...An interesting ancillary value of the file is that it reveals glaring omissions in subject coverage, which in turn point up research needs in the field.
>
> (Kirk, 1958, p. 89, italics hers)

Harmon and Harker (1987) also used an archival approach in which they chronicled themes in counseling psychology research through a comprehensive listing of The Counseling Psychologist titles. More recent computerized reference retrieval systems (e.g. PSYCLIT) also exemplify an archival approach to research organization.

A categorical approach to research organization is illustrated in Munley (1974), who developed some 16 categories in a content analysis of articles in the Journal of Counseling Psychology. Although no effort was made to establish or clarify relations among categories, this analysis nonetheless hinted at prevailing research themes. Categorical organization was also suggested by Gelso (1979) in his landmark discussion of counseling psychology research. According to this scheme, research could be classified as to its setting and degree of independent variable control in a four-cell (experimental/correlational analogue/field) matrix. This organizational scheme has since been used in an investigation

(Scherman & Doan, 1985) of subjects, designs and generalizations in volumes 25 - 29 of the Journal of Counseling Psychology.

An encyclopedic approach to research organization is illustrated in Brown and Lent's (1984) Handbook of Counseling Psychology, which may be considered representative of prevailing research themes in the field. The organizational scheme is again largely archival, but some sense of context and interrelation among the themes is implicit in their exposition. The topical issues of The Counseling Psychologist may also be considered encyclopedic in setting forth and expounding upon a common theme.

Taxonomic approaches to research organization derive from the supposition that some research is more general and inclusive than others. In constructing a research taxonomy, articles representative of research themes are first selected and then heirchically arranged such that broader or more general themes contain more specific ones. Kunkel, Wood & Shreve (1989) developed a taxonomy of counseling psychology research in which some 200 research titles were heirchically arrayed along four levels of abstraction. While highly dependent on the authors' formulations about relations among research topics, this taxonomic approach nonetheless served as a visual organizational model of counseling psychology research.

In contrast to more idiosyncratic schemes, statistical strategies use data-dependent organizational methods (Mezzich & Solomon, 1980). These methods have included Q-sorts and more

recently cluster analysis and multidimensional scaling. In an attempt at statistical research organization, Wampold and White (1985) computed an index of similarity (based on common citations) for selected articles in the Journal of Counseling Psychology. Cluster analysis was then performed on indices of similarity in an effort to statistically identify groups of studies with related research focus. Predictably, results were somewhat distorted by the tendency of authors to extensively cite their own previous work. Nevertheless, one relatively robust cluster emerged, which was interpreted based on content of the commonly referenced articles to reflect research in social influence. The authors conclude that in the absence of more compelling clusters, their investigation "raises the possibility that research in the field is generally unprogrammatic" (Wampold & White, 1985, p. 126).

While each of these organizational approaches has merit, none fully captures the domain and structure of counseling psychology research. Concept mapping is an alternative organizational scheme that incorporates archival, categorical and statistical elements of previous efforts. As primarily used by the author and his associates, concept mapping combines phenomenological inquiry, qualitative analysis, and unstructured card sorts to capture research participants' experience of a phenomenon (e.g. depression; Daughtry & Kunkel, 1991) and allow participants to meaningfully organize the elements of their experience (cf. Kunkel, 1991). Typically participants'

unconstrained responses to an inquiry (e.g. "Why did you come to counseling?"; Kunkel & Newsom, 1991) furnish the phenomenological report from which the researchers derive items, these items then being sorted by participants and the sorts analyzed through multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis. Researchers can also ask participants to rate each item for how well it reflects their individual experience with the phenomenon of interest. The entire process results in a statistically derived visual representation, or concept map, of the phenomenon as defined, organized and perhaps prioritized by research participants. A concept map of counseling psychology research would illustrate the scope of research inquiry and reveal the way in which topics are organized and prioritized within the research domain.

A concept map approach to research organization could have used a phenomenological probe (e.g. "What do you think are some important research topics in our field?") from which items were generated. We sought, however, a more reliable perspective on research themes that would not be unduly influenced by the sample employed. Given the precedent (Harmon & Harker; 1987; Munley, 1974; Pepinsky et al, 1978) for considering journals as mirrors of professional emphasis, we decided in the present study to use the topical titles of The Counseling Psychologist (TCP) as the source of concept map items. These titles may represent broader consensus about relevance to the profession than do titles of articles in traditionally reviewed empirical journals in that TCP topics are presented and discussed in conjunction with the yearly

APA convention (Stone, 1991). As such, and as suggested by Harmon and Harker (1987), these titles reflect the research and practice interests of counseling psychologists over the past 21 years.

Method

Participants

Research participants (n = 200) were randomly selected from the Division 17 (Counseling Psychology) membership directory of the American Psychological Association (APA, 1989). To maximize the likelihood of representing psychologists presently active in the field, listings including a birth date prior to 1925 were excluded from the sample.

Procedure

Research packets mailed to prospective participants contained a cover letter, demographic sheet, instructions for performing a card sort on an enclosed bundle of cards, a rating sheet for research topics and an instruction sheet for returning the materials. A self-addressed business reply envelope was also enclosed.

Demographic items included degree held, accreditation status of the degree-granting institution, gender, ethnic membership, years since matriculation, and time spent in various professional activities. Items were selected from those in previous professional identity surveys (Fitzgerald & Osipow, 1986; Watkins, Lopez, Campbell & Himmell, 1986) to evaluate

comparability of our participants to those in these investigations.

A review of Harmon and Harker (1987), in conjunction with inspection of subsequent TCP titles, was first performed. With duplicate titles (e.g. Counseling Women I, II, III) collapsed, the first issue in 1969 through July, 1990 yielded 65 TCP titles.

Participants first completed a rating sheet in which they were asked to indicate the perceived professional significance each title had for them. Titles were rated using a four-point equidistant Likert format (Dobson & Mothersill, 1979), with one signifying Slightly Significant and four Very Significant, an additional "X" category included to allow participants to identify those titles which were unknown to them.

Participants then sorted into piles cards on which each title was printed with the instruction to do so "in a way that makes sense to you". In performing the sorting task participants were asked not to refer to their significance ratings, to place each card into only one pile, and that although there may be some cards that they wished to place alone in a pile, to not place every card alone. No other restrictions were placed on the card sorts. Paper clips were placed by participants around each sorted pile and the research materials returned.

Analysis

In that the number of sorted piles employed by participants provides an indirect mirror of their organizational strategies (Davison, Richards, & Rounds, 1986; Martin, Slemon, Hiebert,

Hallbert, & Cummings, 1989) one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed to evaluate the number of sorted piles by participants' gender, degree, years since matriculation, and degree-granting institution.

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) for each TCP title rating were calculated. Mean ratings were ranked to illustrate patterns of significance ratings and areas of knowledge.

A two-dimensional nonmetric multidimensional scaling procedure (MDS) was then performed on the proximity matrix derived from participants' sorts. Multidimensional scaling is a statistical technique that analyzes open card sort data to visually and numerically reflect the perceived similarity of sorted items. Points representing the sorted items are arranged in two-dimensional space such that the distance between any two points reflects the frequency with which the items were sorted together across subjects (Buser, 1989). Hierarchical cluster analysis was then performed on the items to group them into clusters reflecting similar concepts. Clusters of items were assigned names based on the composition of the items within them.

Results

Sixty-four packets were initially returned, of which 48 were complete. A follow-up mailing two weeks after the initial request yielded four additional complete packets. While the resulting return rate of 26% is low, the final sample was demographically comparable to that in previous studies

(Fitzgerald & Osipow, 1986; Watkins et al., 1986) thought to be representative of Division 17 membership.

One-way analyses of variance for the number of sorted categories by gender (F =.97, p <.33), degree (F = .02, p < .89), institutional status (F = .55, p < .58) and years since matriculation (F = .37, p < .77) failed to reach significance. The results of all groups were therefore combined in computation of the map.

A ranked list of participants' ratings of the professional significance of items is found in Table 1. Practice and development-related titles (e.g. "Counseling Adults", "Counseling for Health", "Supervision in Counseling", "Marriage and Family Counseling") were rated by participants as having a high professional significance. Titles having to do with special applications (e.g. "Student Unrest") and professional identity (e.g. "The Counseling Psychologist: A Retrospective") were rated relatively lower. Mean item ratings ranged from 3.50 (sd = .67) to 2.14 (sd = .96).

Insert Table 1 about here

The final weight value for the two-dimensional MDS solution was .22, suggesting very good stability of the model and good fit across subjects (Kruskal & Wish, 1978). The concept map of the 65 TCP titles is found in Figure 1. In that this way of presenting data may be unusual, some detailed explanation of the

map follows. The 65 titles are represented as points on the map. The placement of points is derived from the multidimensional scaling solution, the distance between them reflecting the frequency with which the items were sorted together by participants. That is, points which are relatively close together represent titles which were sorted together in participants' piles more frequently than titles which are represented by points more distant from one another. Clusters of items from the cluster analyses are identified by boundaries around groups of points, representing items that were frequently sorted together in the same pile and less often sorted with items in other piles. Finally, the names within each cluster are those given to the cluster by the researchers in consideration of items making up the clusters. The TCP titles contained within each cluster are found in Table 2.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Insert Table 2 about here

Interpretation of multidimensional scaling analysis involves examination of the point plot for underlying structure (see Buser, 1989). Consideration is given to apparent regions of the map, adjacency of conceptually similar constructs, and dimensional axes around which points may be configured.

Inspection of item clusters can be helpful in this process as well. The goal of this analysis is to make informed conjecture about the possible structure participants imposed on the sorted items.

Inspection of the map suggests that TCP titles were organized by participants into several distinct regions. The points in the upper half of the map appear to reflect titles having to do with educational or scientific activities, while those in the lower half have more to do with practice-related roles. The items in the lower right sector of the map all seem to be perceived as similarly related to counseling theories and applications. In contrast, items in the lower left sector of the map seem to reflect titles having to do with developmental influences or special populations. Research titles constituted a relatively isolated and distinct cluster of titles apparently perceived as being quite separate from other areas.

Discussion

The low return rate is perhaps a function of the novelty and apparent involvement required by the task in which potential participants opened an envelope to find more than a standard questionnaire. Unlike our experience with previous mailed questionnaires, however, many potential participants choosing not to respond did not simply discard the materials. Some 14 packets were returned with apologetic explanations to the effect that despite being interested in the task, time or other considerations prohibited participation. We were encouraged to

find that the final sample was demographically comparable to Division 17 membership, yet also acknowledge the difficulties resulting from its small size. In alternative approaches to research, breadth of inquiry (and generalizability) are occasionally sacrificed to depth (and increased understanding) (cf. Patton, 1990). To the extent that our participants meaningfully arrayed and prioritized these research titles, an alternative organizational scheme resulted. Future projects could strive for a larger sample and higher return rate through stratified rather than random sampling, in which (for example) research packets were sent to collaborators in various settings for distribution. Such projects might also employ, through phenomenological inquiry, a broader perspective on counseling research.

We were interested in the title ratings as they may mirror the perceived significance of some elements of counseling psychology research. The traditional professional emphasis on development and facilitation are reflected in participants' relatively high endorsement of these items. The tendency to rate the significance of strictly theoretical or research-based topics somewhat lower may manifest the increasingly pragmatic approach to counseling psychology indicated in other perspectives on professional identity (Watkins et al., 1986). Perspectives on professional identity tended also to be rated lower, suggesting perhaps ongoing frustration around this topic (see Duffy, 1991).

The inclusion of the "area unknown" rating option enabled

identification of titles which were apparently not salient for participants. While the modal "unknown" endorsement for most items was zero, several titles received many such ratings ("Psychological Nigrescence", 29; "Integrity Group Therapy", 22; "Adaptive Counseling and Psychotherapy", 17; "Interactional Counseling", 15; "Deliberate Psychological Education", 10). Although two of these titles ("Integrity Group Therapy" and "Deliberate Psychological Education") may be somewhat anachronistic, the remaining three reflect rather recent topics and would be expected to be known to Division 17 membership. We would hope that should this apparent ignorance be general, it might be remedied in the future through inclusion of these topics in the multicultural and counseling theories components of the curriculum.

Despite the relatively small sample, a stable and robust MDS solution emerged. Participants apparently organized the titles in meaningful ways. Several exceptions (e.g. the sorting of "Individual Psychology" with coping items) may reflect semantic misattributions on the part of participants and are nonetheless important as they may indicate lack of familiarity (in this case with Adlerian psychology). The overall structure of the map suggests that counseling psychology research is apparently interrelated, and that meaningful linkages can be built among research topics.

Concept mapping of counseling psychology research has several possible applications. First, it provide a visual

representation of the professional domain of interest. A concept map of counseling psychology research could also be compared with that generated by themes in other professional areas such as clinical psychology to illustrate different emphases. Second, concept mapping transcends categorical or archival organizational approaches in that it enables placement of topics within the context of research as a whole. The conceptual similarity of adjacent titles permits identification of related topics and establishment of linkages within the field. For example, the map suggests that research in health counseling would benefit from a knowledge of developmental theory, ethics, coping, and relationships. Third, isolated or anomalous areas of inquiry might be identified in the way suggested by Kirk (1958). It seems, for example, that our participants perceived research on research as an important but nevertheless very distinct area of professional inquiry. Finally, the map could serve an indexing or categorizing function to be used in research organization.

Concept mapping appears to be a viable alternative research method for investigations wherein the contents and underlying structure of phenomena are areas of focus. In addition to providing a concept map of counseling psychology research, we hoped to have illustrated the applications of this method.

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Author Notes

Some aspects of this investigation were discussed at the American Psychological Association convention in San Francisco, CA, August, 1991. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Mark A. Kunkel, Department of Psychology, Box 4100, Lubbock, TX 79409.

Table 1

Ranked Mean Professional Significance Ratings of 65 The Counseling Psychologist Titles, one (low) to four (high) Likert scale

	$\bar{x}$	s	Rated as "Unknown"
Counseling Adults	3.50	.67	0
Cross-Cultural Counseling	3.49	.70	1
Marriage and Family Counseling	3.46	.64	0
Counseling for Health	3.44	.80	0
Adult Transitions	3.42	.64	0
Testing and Assessment	3.41	.70	1
Group Therapy	3.40	.69	0
Cognitive Approaches	3.40	.80	0
Counseling Women	3.38	.72	0
Family CP	3.38	.72	0
Ethical Decision-Making	3.37	.82	0
Career Development of Women	3.35	.59	1
CP and Aging	3.35	.74	1
Supervision in CP	3.35	.76	0
The Relationship in Counseling	3.33	.81	0
The Healthy Personality	3.33	.82	1
Counseling Men	3.31	.78	0
Personal Problem-Solving	3.29	.78	1
Stress Counseling	3.25	.68	0
Consultation	3.25	.81	0

Table 1 (continued)

Ranked Mean Professional Significance Ratings of 65 The Counseling Psychologist Titles, one (low) to four (high) Likert scale

	$\bar{x}$	s	Rated as "Unknown"
Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment	3.25	.84	0
Internship	3.24	.84	1
Developmental CP	3.20	.78	1
Research in CP	3.19	.91	0
Parenting Counseling	3.16	.83	1
Career Counseling	3.15	.92	0
Research Training in CP	3.14	.89	1
Vocational Development Theory	3.13	.82	0
New Directions in Training	3.12	.86	0
Professional Certification in CP	3.12	.84	1
Individual Psychology	3.10	.82	0
Behavioral Counseling	3.10	.91	0
Vicimization	3.02	.81	1
The Behavior Therapies	3.02	.94	0
Dual Career Families in Perspective	3.00	.77	1
Professional Identity	3.00	.99	0
Sex Counseling	2.96	.82	0
Client-Centered Therapy	2.94	.87	0
Adaptive Counseling/Psychotherapy	2.91	.82	17
Systematic Training	2.91	.86	8

Table 1 (continued)

Ranked Mean Professional Significance Ratings of 65 The Counseling Psychologist Titles, one (low) to four (high) Likert scale

	$\bar{x}$	s	Rated as "Unknown"
Rational Emotive Therapy	2.83	1.00	0
Carl Rogers on Empathy	2.81	.95	0
CP: The Next Decade	2.81	.97	0
Ego and Self	2.81	.97	0
Existential Counseling	2.78	.92	1
Psychological Nigrescence	2.78	.95	29
Assertion Training	2.76	.86	1
Gestalt Therapy	2.73	.89	0
Interactional Counseling	2.73	.96	15
Paradoxical Interventions	2.69	.95	0
CP in the Year 2000	2.69	.99	1
Black Students in Higher Education	2.67	.93	1
CP in the Justice System	2.65	.93	1
Alternative Research Paradigms	2.62	.92	2
Third National Conference in CP	2.61	1.04	3
Deliberate Psychological Education	2.60	.94	10
Computer-Assisted Counseling	2.59	.85	1
Leisure Counseling	2.53	1.05	1
CP: A Historical Perspective	2.50	.87	0
Encounter Groups	2.42	.89	0

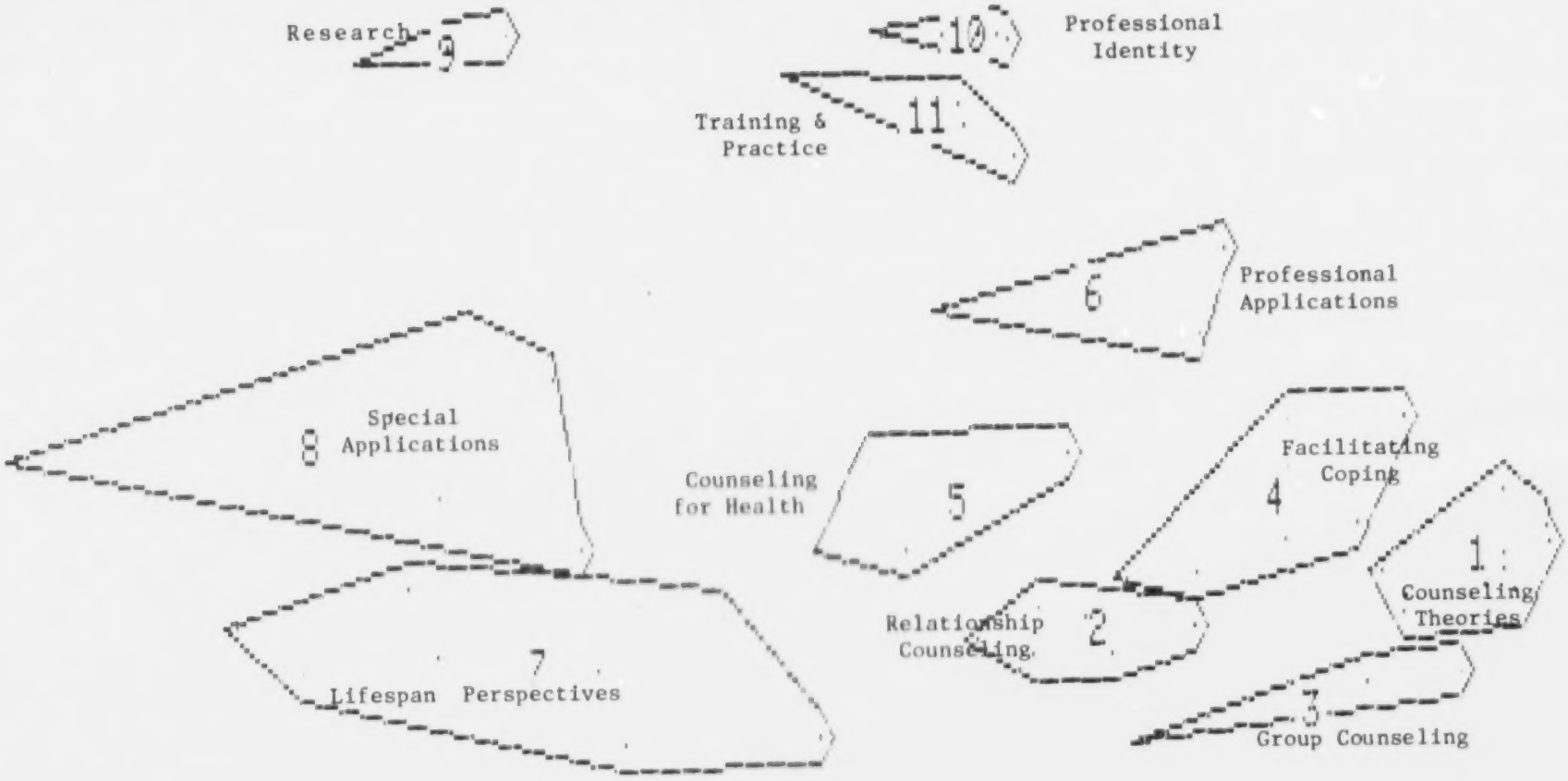
Table 1 (continued)

Ranked Mean Professional Significance Ratings of 65 The Counseling Psychologist Titles, one (low) to four (high) Likert scale

	$\bar{x}$	s	Rated as "Unknown"
Business & Industry	2.40	1.05	0
Integrity Group Therapy	2.30	1.09	22
Religious Faith Across the Lifespan	2.23	.92	0
TCP: A Retrospective	2.22	.90	3
Student Unrest	2.14	.96	1

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Concept map of 65 The Counseling Psychologist titles (Based on the multidimensional scaling plot of participants' [n = 52] unstructured card sorts of the titles. Points representing the titles are also clustered according to similarity).


Research
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Professional Identity
Training & Practice
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Professional Applications
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Special Applications
Counseling for Health
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Facilitating Coping
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Counseling Theories
Relationship Counseling
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7
Lifespan Perspectives
3
Group Counseling